

Parental and Peer Attachment, Adjustment, and Mental Health in College Students

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Most high school students pursue higher education after graduation, yet universities continue to struggle with retention of students. Consequently, there is increasing interest in the factors influencing the coinciding periods of college adjustment and late adolescence/early adulthood. The present study examined the differential relations of parent and peer attachment, as well as depressive symptomatology, on overall adjustment to college for 429 undergraduate students (M age = 22.2 years, SD = 5.6 years) who completed self-report measures of the variables on an online survey. Regression analyses showed that peer attachment and depression symptoms were direct predictors of all students' adjustment to college. Path analyses revealed that peer attachment mediated the relationship between depressive symptoms and adjustment to college for all students; results were similar when the predictor and mediator variables were switched. Additionally, there was a significant indirect effect for mother and father attachment on adjustment through depression symptoms for all students. Finally, peer attachment mediated the relationship between mother and father attachment on adjustment to college for underclass (3 semesters or less) students, but not for upperclass students. These findings support research that suggests parents play an important role in adjustment to college, while extending the idea that peers may be more influential in adjustment not only in adolescence, but also into early adulthood. Promotion of peer relations, awareness of depression symptoms, as well as the provision of techniques for both students and parents to navigate the transition in their relationship could be target areas for universities looking to increase student retention.

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Biography

Rebekah Stafford is a senior at the University of New Haven studying Psychology with a concentration in Community-Clinical Psychology. She is also obtaining a minor in Philosophy. Rebekah is currently continuing her interest in research as an intern at the Yale Child Study Center for Anxiety Disorders. Upon graduation in May of 2018, she plans to continue onto graduate studies in pursuit of a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology.

